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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Goma Report for December 6, 2007

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: MONUC/Goma reports that FARDC pressed northward five miles from Sake by early morning December 6 and was now shelling Kibati. Nkunda's forces have been cleared out of the Sake-Masisi road, but traffic is not yet moving. One of the FARDC brigades involved in taking Mashaki is moving to Katale (near Masisi) to position itself for a possible Nkunda thrust in that direction. Nkunda himself is thought to be in Kibati, where he has reinforced his forces. He has urged IDP's in Kirolirwe camp to stay put, perhaps hoping to sacrifice them to his propaganda advantage. Tutsis appear to be staying while some Hutus have moved northward. The small MONUC force in Kirolirwe is urging all IDP's to move north to Kitchanga, a larger town with a larger MONUC presence. End Summary.

Military Campaign

¶2. (SBU) MONUC military briefer informed poloff December 6 that, as of the end of December 5, all the hills around Mushaki had been brought under virtually full FARDC control. One of the three brigades involved in the campaign remained December 6 in the Mushaki area to ensure full control. A second was moving further west along the road to Masisi as far as Katale to position itself in the event that Nkunda's forces attempted a westward thrust. The third brigade had now pushed north of Sake on the road to Kirolirwe and Kitchanga, had taken Kingi (five miles north of Sake), and was now shelling Kibati just north of Kingi. Nkunda's forces at Kibati were believed to have been supplemented over the past few days by 120 men, with a total Nkunda force at Kibati now of 340. Nkunda himself is believed to be at Kibati. The volcanic terrain there is hilly, not mountainous. (Note: This briefing suggests a more cautious approach by the FARDC than the one outlined the previous day by INDBDE commander General Indrajeet Narayan.)

¶3. (SBU) According to the MONUC briefer, the MONUC patrol dispatched the previous day to Nyanzale and Kikuku learned that Nkunda's forces, which had taken these towns over the weekend, had now evacuated them. Caritas informed MONUC that 521 families had been displaced in the area by Nkunda's attack, dispersing north and east in an arc from Bambo to Kanyabayonga. In Kibirizi two companies of FARDC 9th Integrated Brigade opened fire December 5 against each other, causing a temporary displacement of the local populace. Meanwhile the Rutshuru-Bunagana sector, adjoining the Nkunda-controlled enclave on the tri-border area with Uganda and Rwanda, has remained surprisingly quiet.

¶4. (SBU) Journalists who visited Mushaki December 5 succeeded in simply driving up to the largely abandoned village and did not see much evidence of fighting. However, they said the sound of exploding shells in the surrounding hills was impressive.

Specter of Tutsi Massacre

15. (SBU) MONUC Head of Office Ulli Mwambulukutu told poloff that MONUC was intensely concerned at the prospect of harm to the IDP's gathered at Kirolirwe (perhaps 5,000 in the camp with another 5-10,000 in the immediate area). Some of the non-Tutsi portion (mostly Hutus), according to Mwambulukutu, have begun to move northward toward Kitchanga in anticipation of fighting, but Nkunda has been preaching to the IDP's to stay put and "hold out to the last person." According to information coming from the MONUC military observation post at Kirolirwe, the Tutsi IDP's there are so far largely obeying Nkunda's orders and staying put. Mwambulukutu feared that the MONUC military observation post (60 men) near the camp would afford too little protection, whereas the IDP's would be better protected at the much larger town of Kitchanga further north, where MONUC has a permanent base (250 men).

16. (SBU) Mwambulukutu said MONUC had urged FARDC (at the level of Chief of Staff Kayembe and down the chain) in the strongest terms to avoid harm to these IDP's or the local population. At least at the higher levels of FARDC there appeared to be a complete comprehension of the importance of the issue. Mwambulukutu had just come off the telephone to the Governor of North Kivu to urge the same message. Poloff noted that visiting journalists with whom he had spoken appeared to be viewing the plight of IDP's at Kirolirwe as the principal upcoming story and that these journalists were prepared to level accusations at MONUC for not having done enough to prevent harm to the Tutsi population. Mwambulukutu said that he was aware of the full range of potential negative consequences. He personally favored a cessation of military activity if the FARDC took Kibati and he was going to urge this idea on MONUC commander General Gaye, visiting Goma later in the day. However, Mwambulukutu pointed out that, far from a "Waterloo specter," it was entirely possible that Nkunda and his forces would just melt away into the bush.

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